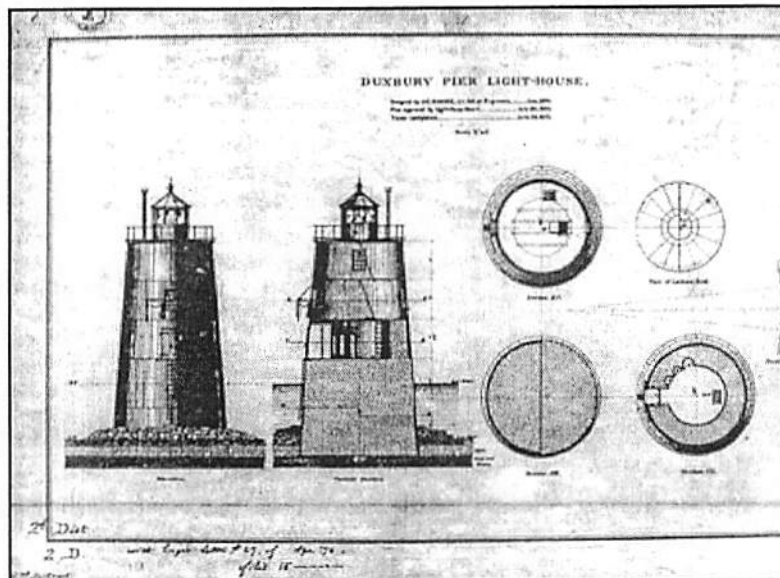


History

Duxbury Pier Light was built in 1871 on the north side of the main channel in Plymouth Harbor to mark the dangerous shoal off Saquish Head. The unusual coffeepot-shaped lighthouse is locally known as "Bug Light" or simply "The Bug." It occupies an important niche in lighthouse history as the first offshore cast iron, caisson "spark plug" type lighthouse in the United States.



When the lighthouse was first built there were no outside decks. (From Stebbins' *Illustrated Coast Pilot*, 1902.)



A local resident named William W. Burgess, Jr. later described his involvement in the construction of Duxbury Pier Lighthouse:

"In April '71 they decided to build an iron lighthouse near the Duxbury Pier on the flats close to the edge of the channel, and my father and I contracted with the Government Inspector to build it. It was built of iron plates, 10 feet long with flanges on each to bolt them together and form a circle 28 feet in diameter at the bottom. This section was put together in North Dock and a cofferdam built inside of it to float it, and one Sunday we towed it down with the government schooner and our sloop *Rose Wood*, placed it in position then broke in the cofferdam and sunk it. I got \$3.00 for my part of the job, which was looking on."

The lighthouse contains three levels which were used as living quarters and a watchroom. The lantern room held a fourth order Fresnel lens, first lighted on September 15, 1871.



To protect the structure, 100 tons of stones were placed around the base in 1886. A 700-gallon water cistern was added in 1900.

Fred Bohm, later keeper at Deer Island in Boston Harbor, was keeper at Duxbury Pier Light in the 1930s.

It was reported by writer Edward Rowe Snow that in one year Bohm rescued 90 persons, including 36 girl scouts.

One windy night Bohm heard a scream for help. He rushed out to see a woman swimming toward the lighthouse from her capsized boat. Not able to row to her in time, Bohm dove into the water and swam to the woman, who was unconscious by the time he reached her. Bohm brought the woman back to the lighthouse where she gradually came to. In her struggle to stay afloat she had lost her bathing suit.

As she regained consciousness, the woman's first words were, "Where are my clothes?" Keeper Bohm answered, "I don't know, but you're lucky to be alive." Later that night the woman was safely ashore with borrowed clothes.



In December 1942, the keeper and a companion were heading for the mainland to pick up provisions, but nearly drowned when their boat began to leak. A lobsterman rescued the pair, but the keeper lost two fingers from frostbite.

Coast Guardsman Harry Salter was keeper at "The Bug" in 1944. He has written a booklet about his time at "The Bug," called simply *Bug Light*. Salter was at Duxbury Pier Light when the Hurricane of 1944 hit, battering the isolated station with 30-foot waves. He described the scene:

"The gigantic waves were hammering this stout little light station unmercifully. It shook so bad we had trouble keeping the oil lamps lit... The heavy seas on the east side were striking against the light, then crashing up under the catwalk and tearing away at our boat that we had previously lashed high on the davits."

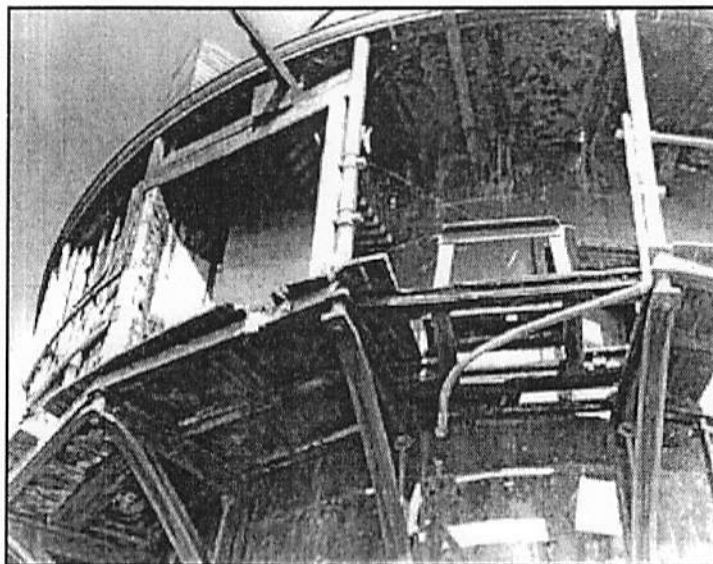
Salter went out on the deck in an effort to secure the boat. A wave opened the trap door near him and Salter fell through. Fortunately another wave drove Salter against the ladder, and he was able to climb to safety. Salter gave up on saving the boat and watched the hurricane from inside the tower for the next few hours. He and the other keepers surveyed the damage later and found that the boat, the fog bell mechanism, and the outhouse were all gone.



U.S. Coast Guard photo

The lighthouse was automated in 1964 and the keepers were removed. A modern optic replaced the Fresnel lens. Over the next two decades Duxbury Pier Light fell victim to much vandalism and seabirds made themselves a home in the interior.

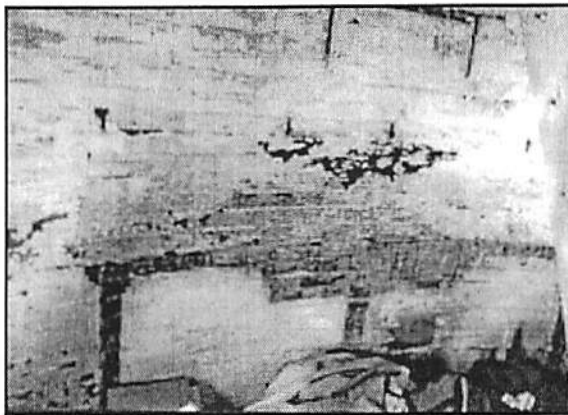
In 1983 Duxbury Pier Light was slated by the Coast Guard to be replaced by a fiberglass tower much like the one that had replaced Boston Harbor's old Deer Island Lighthouse. The Coast Guard had estimated that a renovation of the current structure would have cost \$250,000. A group of concerned local residents formed Project Bug Light.



Part of the structure before renovation
U.S. Coast Guard photo

Aided by Congressman Gerry Studds, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, and State Senator Edward P. Kirby, the group convinced the Coast Guard to alter their plans. A five-year lease was granted to the preservation committee. The Coast Guard sandblasted and painted the structure and did some repair work in 1983; the work was completed in 1985. The Coast Guard spent \$100,000 to refurbish the lower half of the lighthouse. Project Bug Light raised \$20,000 from local

businesses, as well as sales of T-shirts and bumper stickers, a fashion show, baseball games, and raffling a painting. They used this money to restore the upper parts and the interior, including the rebuilding of the roof and the catwalk. At the same time solar power replaced the older battery system. The fog signal was also converted to solar power.



Before the repainting of the tower's interior in 2001, you could still see the outline of the kitchen sink on an inside wall.

In the late 1980s vandals broke into the lantern room, leaving it susceptible to leaks. The weather deteriorated the wood interior so much that all the wood had to be removed, leaving bare iron walls.

After a few years Project Bug Light virtually dissolved as an organization, and the five-year lease expired. In 1993 the Coast Guard again talked of replacing the lighthouse with a fiberglass pole, or at least removing the lantern room. This time Dr. Don Muirhead of Duxbury, an avid sailor, spearheaded a new preservation effort. The Coast Guard again refurbished the lighthouse in 1996.

Project Bug Light is now responsible for the care of Plymouth ("Gurnet") Light as well, and they have changed the name of the organization to match the mission. Founder Don Muirhead died in 2000, but the volunteers of **Project Gurnet & Bug Lights, Inc.** continue to do maintenance at the light and to raise funds toward the continued preservation of "The Bug."

In the fall of 2001 **Project Gurnet & Bug Lights, Inc.** hired the Campbell Construction Group of Beverly, Massachusetts for another major renovation of the lighthouse.

Joints in the caisson were repaired by caulking and welding, and over 1,200 pounds of rust was removed from the lighthouse. All the paint was removed inside and out, and three new coats



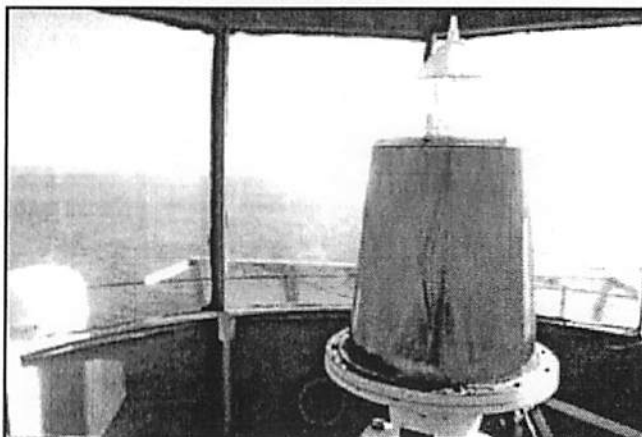
of paint were added. In addition, several inches of guano were removed.

During the 2001 restoration, before the lower part of the tower was repainted



The Campbell Construction Group crew at the lighthouse in October 2001. Left to right: Clem Fraize, Jeremy Campbell, Juan Glidden and project supervisor Marty Nally.

Duxbury Pier Light remains an active aid to navigation. While it can be seen distantly from the Plymouth waterfront, it is best viewed from the harbor cruises and whale watches out of Plymouth.



Inside the lantern room

For more information or to support the maintenance of Duxbury Pier
Light, contact:

7/7

Project Gurnet & Bug Lights, Inc.

P.O. Box 2167
Duxbury, MA 02331

Keepers: Frank Allen Davis (?-1920); Frank A. Grieder (1930-1934);
Fred Bohm (c. 1930s); Homer Hathaway (1942-1943); Harry Salter
(Coast Guard, c. 1944); ? Jovie (Coast Guard, c. 1943); Ellis Woods
(Coast Guard, c. 1943)

Last updated 7/30/03

[Duxbury Pier Light main page](#) / [History](#) / [Bibliography](#) / [Cruises](#) / [Photos](#) / [Postcards](#) / [Maps](#)

[Massachusetts Menu](#) / [New England Menu](#) / [Back to Contents](#)



**NEW ENGLAND LIGHTHOUSES
A VIRTUAL GUIDE
WWW.LIGHTHOUSE.CC**

© Coastlore Productions. Do not reproduce any images or text from this website without permission of the author.